

Summary of Customer Satisfaction Survey Results: Public Water System Owners

Prepared for:

**Washington State Department of Health
Office of Drinking Water**

By:

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Washington State Department of Health
Office of Drinking Water
Customer Satisfaction Survey
Public Water System Owners

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I. BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

BACKGROUND

In early 2004, the Washington State Department of Health, Office of Drinking Water (ODW), contracted with Barney & Worth (consultant) to complete a customer satisfaction survey targeting a specific ODW Operator Certification Program audience: public water system owners. The survey was designed to elicit feedback from water system owner respondents regarding the current quality of ODW outreach and communications to system owners, and to identify areas for future improvement. A total of 1,940 surveys were distributed, and 991 were returned, for a total response rate of 51%.

METHODOLOGY

The consultant and ODW staff met on several occasions to shape the nature and content of the Public Water System Owner survey. A summary of key survey characteristics and decision points is provided below. A copy of the survey is included in the appendix.

- ODW opted to survey every one of its customers, as opposed to conducting “sampling,” thus ensuring all system owners were given a voice.
- Staff worked to ensure the survey was as concise and simple as possible to reduce completion time and clarity for its customers.
- The survey was mailed to all customers, but also offered on the web as another time and cost saving effort. ODW provided “self-addressed, postage-paid” return envelopes.
- Geographic representation was a priority. Staff wished to ensure surveys were received from all parts of state.
- Time and budget constraints precluded pre-promotion and follow-up activities; however, this decision does not appear to have led to a decline in response rate.
- A draft survey was tested with members of the Water Works Operator Certification Advisory Committee prior to dissemination.
- Staff requested the survey address the following customer satisfaction service categories:
 - Toll-Free Telephone Line
 - Publications (Written Communications)
 - Training / Education
 - Web Site (Electronic Communications)
 - Personal Contact

Additional methodological information is provided in section IV, “Question-Specific Results.”

II. OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

Individual survey questions are analyzed in Section IV, Question-Specific Results. However, it is worth noting a few overall findings here:

- The Public Water System Owner Customer Satisfaction Survey had a response rate over 50%, without pre-distribution advertising or targeted follow-up. This is a figure to be proud of for any survey, but is especially impressive for a “non-controversial” topic. Such a high response rate reflects a high level of program interest among Operator Certification “owner” customers, and excellent staff input in the actual survey design.
- Desired geographic representation was achieved. Survey responses came from all parts of the state, with double-digit responses from all but a handful of counties.
- The vast majority of respondents (87%) have served more than two years in their current position, indicating a good degree of continuity among system owners. This is also reflected in a high number of respondents (91%) indicating an “average” or better understanding of program requirements.
- By far, the largest number of respondents (62%) indicate they represent water systems serving fewer than 250 people.
- Overall, owner customers view staff communications and interaction favorably. Over two-thirds of respondents rated staff performance or communications methods “above average” or better for each survey question. The number of respondents describing staff performance or communication methods below average does not exceed 4% for any specific question.
- On a “user-friendly” scale, approximately 44% of respondents ranked program forms and applications as “average.” While this does not indicate dissatisfaction, it does suggest there may be ways to simplify or lessen paperwork. On the other hand, it may reflect a general apathy toward completing required forms and applications.
- The Water Tap newsletter appears to be one of, if not the most, popular communications tool – with 77% of respondents giving it their first or second highest rating.
- About 20% of respondents appear to be unfamiliar with the toll-free telephone line (this does not include the number of dissatisfied). There appears to be an opportunity to better promote this communications tool.
- Some 43% of respondents say they are not familiar with, or have not used the program web site. While many of these individuals may not have web access, additional promotion and advertising might well increase the number of visitors.
- 97% of respondents characterized survey “ease of completion” as average or better, which likely played some role in the high response rate.

III. QUESTION-SPECIFIC RESULTS

Results and analysis from individual survey questions are provided below. Each subsection includes the original survey question, a summary table displaying a tabulation of results and a brief interpretation of responses. Tabulations include the sum total of responses received from both the hard copy and electronic versions of the survey.

The total percentage of each response has been calculated for all available options for each question, based on the total number of responses received for that specific question. Calculations were made in this way to reflect a “dual” survey design. Whereas all electronic submitters were required to complete each field, respondents completing the hard-copy survey did not necessarily complete every question or may have, in some cases, given more than one response for one or more questions. By basing an individual response option’s percentage on the individual question’s total number of responses, the analyst is able to more accurately assess respondents’ ranking of a particular topic. Nonetheless, in the tabulations table for each question, the author has provided both a number and percent of persons “not responding” and identified questions where these figures are important to note. The total number of persons “not responding” was obtained by subtracting the number of responses received for a particular question from the total number of surveys received (Sample = 1,013).

Finally, it is worth noting that percentages have been rounded to the nearest percentage point (e.g. 8.14% = 8%; 35.65% = 36%). Where the total percentage was found to exceed or fall short of a full 100% response rate for any particular question, the individual response furthest away from the next percentage point was rounded down or up to provide an even 100%.¹

A summary of each question is provided below, in the order each appeared in the original survey.

QUESTION #1: POSITION IN PUBLIC WATER SYSTEM

Which of the following best describes your position in your public water system?		
Response Options	Total Responses	Percent of Responses
Owner	81	8
Owner / Operator	359	35
Board Member / Trustee	203	20
Other	370	37
Total Number of Responses	1013	100
Not Responding	0	0

- Although this survey was directed to public water system “owners,” only 8% of respondents identified themselves exclusively as an owner. This is likely due to the fact that small water systems are set-up under many different organizational and management structures. The comments received for this question indicate many responders are either owners and managers, or managers or other representatives authorized to respond on behalf of the owner.

¹ When rounding, the total percentage may sometimes fall below or exceed the 100% total due to a prevalence of individual percentages above or below the .5% cut-off. To rectify this incongruence, it is sometimes necessary to round an individual response up or down to reach a clean 100% total. For example, if an additional 1% is needed to reach 100% total for a specific question, and there are two “mid-range” responses such as 14.44% and 14.48%, the 14.48% response would be rounded to 15%. This technique simplifies the review of response results without significantly impacting analysis.

QUESTION #2: LENGTH OF SERVICE

How long have you served in the position you indicated above?		
Response Options	Total Responses	Percent of Responses
Less than 1 year	60	6
1 – 2 years	69	7
More than 2 years	849	87
Total Number of Responses	978	100
Not Responding	35	3

- The vast majority of respondents (87%) have served two or more years in their current position. This indicates good stability across the range of small public water systems, and a high likelihood that most respondents have interacted in some way with the Operator Certification Program.

QUESTION #3: LOCATION OF PUBLIC WATER SYSTEM

- Over 990 responses were received for this question, with water systems represented in every one of Washington's Counties. A breakdown of water system representation by county, in ascending order follows:

Asotin	1	Stevens	13	Lewis	30
Wahkiakum	3	Walla Walla	13	Grant	33
Ferry	5	Franklin	14	Kitsap	35
Pend Oreille	8	Whitman	14	Mason	36
Kittitas	9	Adams	15	Yakima	44
Lincoln	9	Clark	15	Snohomish	46
Douglas	10	(No Response)	16	Whatcom	56
Cowlitz	11	Grays Harbor	19	Spokane	60
Jefferson	11	Benton	22	Pierce	63
Klickitat	12	Okanogan	22	King	68
Skagit	12	San Juan	22	Thurston	77
Skamania	12	Chelan	26	Island	88
Pacific	13	Clallam	28		

- The counties with the most water systems represented in this survey: Island (88); Thurston (77); King (68); Pierce (63); Spokane (60); Whatcom (56).
- At least 5 systems were located in every other county, except: Asotin (1) and Wahkiakum (3).
- Only 16 survey respondents failed to answer this question.
- A cursory review of overall survey tabulations does not appear to show any correlation between system location and level of satisfaction. There is, however, greater representation from counties west of the Cascade Range.

QUESTION #4: SIZE OF PUBLIC WATER SYSTEM

What is the population served by your water system?		
Response Options	Total Responses	Percent of Responses
Less than 250 people	607	62
251 – 3,300 people	277	28
More than 3,300 people	96	10
Total Number of Responses	980	100
Not Responding	33	3

- Just under two-thirds of respondents own or operate public water systems serving 250 people or less; conversely, just 10% of represented systems serve a population greater than 3,300.
- As seen in the response to system location, system size does not appear to have a correlation to responses elsewhere in the survey (negative or positive). However, there does appear to be some correlation between size of system (small) and familiarity with the full range of communication and information sources (i.e. web site). Additional details are provided in Question #10.

QUESTION #5: UNDERSTANDING OF CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Overall, how would you rate your own understanding of Operator Certification Program requirements?		
Response Options	Total Responses	Percent of Responses
Excellent understanding	126	13
Above average	340	35
Average	422	43
Below average	64	6
Do not understand at all	12	1
Not sure	21	2
Total Number of Responses	985	100
Not Responding	28	3

- Over 90% of respondents feel they have an “average” or better understanding of Operator Certification Program requirements, while nearly 50% feel they have “above average” or better understanding.
- Only 6% of respondents feel they have a “below average” understanding of program requirements, and 12 respondents, or approximately 1%, feel they do not understand the program at all

QUESTION #6: HELPFULNESS OF STAFF

Overall, how helpful have Operator Certification Program staff been in keeping you informed of program requirements?		
Response Options	Total Responses	Percent of Responses
Extremely helpful	218	22
Above average	391	40
Average	264	27
Below average	37	4
Not helpful at all	15	2
Not sure	49	5
Total Number of Responses	974	100
Not Responding	39	4

- Nearly two-thirds of respondents say Operator Certification staff are doing “above average” or better in keeping them apprised of program requirements; almost 90% say staff does at least an “average” or better job.
- Just over 5% of respondents (about 50 of more than 1,000 survey submitters) say staff is doing “below average” or worse in this category.

QUESTION #7: PROMPTNESS OF STAFF

Overall, how would you rate the promptness of Operator Certification Program staff responses to your inquiries and / or requests?		
Response Options	Total Responses	Percent of Responses
Extremely prompt	201	21
Above average	395	41
Average	247	26
Below average	18	2
Not prompt at all	7	1
Not sure	90	9
Total Number of Responses	958	100
Not Responding	55	5

- Approximately two-thirds of respondents describe Operator Certification Program staff as being “above average” or better in terms of their promptness to owner inquiries or requests. Again, nearly 90% say staff’s promptness is “average” or better.
- Less than 3% (25 of 1,000+ respondents) feel the speed of response is “below average” or worse.
- Nearly 10% of survey respondents did not complete this question, which may indicate either A) they have not had direct contact with staff; or B) they did not have a suitable comparison.

QUESTION #8: QUALITY AND CLARITY OF INFORMATION

Overall, how would you rate the quality and clarity of information designed to help you understand the Operator Certification Program?

Response Options	Total Responses	Percent of Responses
Outstanding quality/clarity	118	12
Above average	410	42
Average	352	37
Below average	30	3
Poor quality/clarity	13	1
Not sure	52	5
Total Number of Responses	975	100
Not Responding	38	4

- Over 90% of respondents say the quality / clarity of informational materials is at least “average.”
- Over 50% say quality and clarity is “above average” or better.
- Less than 4% feel informational materials are “below average” or of “poor” quality and clarity.
- While 20% of respondents gave staff promptness and helpfulness their highest rating, a somewhat smaller group (12%) gave an “outstanding” score to the quality and clarity of information. This suggests there may be opportunities to streamline or simplify certain forms and informational pieces.

QUESTION #9: USER-FRIENDLINESS OF FORMS AND APPLICATIONS

Overall, how user-friendly are the forms and applications you are required to complete?

Response Options	Total Responses	Percent of Responses
Very user-friendly	123	13
Above average	304	31
Average	430	44
Below average	48	5
Not user-friendly at all	10	1
Not sure	56	6
Total Number of Responses	971	100
Not Responding	42	4

- Just under 90% of respondents say forms and applications are of “average” or better user-friendliness; fewer of these average or better rankings are actually “above average” than in the previous question, indicating informational materials are better received than forms and applications (not surprisingly).

QUESTION #10 A: CONVERSATIONS WITH OPERATOR CERTIFICATION STAFF

On a scale of 1-5, please rate your level of satisfaction with the following Operator Certification Program communications and information sources:

Conversations with Operator Certification Staff

Response Options	Total Responses	Percent of Responses
5 (Highest Level of Satisfaction)	277	29
4	344	36
3	190	20
2	23	2
1 (Lowest Level of Satisfaction)	9	1
Not Sure	117	12
Total Number of Responses	945	100
Not Responding	68	7

- Approximately two-thirds of respondents give their interaction with Operator Certification Staff the highest or second highest rating. Fewer than 3% say their interactions have been sub-par.
- 185 respondents did not complete the question, or marked “not sure,” indicating they may have had limited or no contact with staff.

QUESTION #10 B: APPLICATIONS PACKET

On a scale of 1-5, please rate your level of satisfaction with the following Operator Certification Program communications and information sources:

Applications Packet

Response Options	Total Responses	Percent of Responses
5 (Highest Level of Satisfaction)	183	19
4	314	33
3	271	29
2	35	4
1 (Lowest Level of Satisfaction)	17	1
Not Sure	137	14
Total Number of Responses	942	100
Not Responding	71	7

- Over 80% of respondents rated the Application Packet the first or second highest level of satisfaction. Just over 5% rated it a 1 or 2 (low level of satisfaction).
- Again, a fairly high number of respondents (218, or about 22%) marked “not sure” or did not respond to this question.

QUESTION # 10 C: RENEWAL NOTICE

On a scale of 1-5, please rate your level of satisfaction with the following Operator Certification Program communications and information sources.

Renewal Notice

Response Options	Total Responses	Percent of Responses
5 (Highest Level of Satisfaction)	280	29
4	303	32
3	232	24
2	36	4
1 (Lowest Level of Satisfaction)	17	1
Not Sure	98	10
Total Number of Responses	951	100
Not Responding	62	6

- About 85% said their level of satisfaction with the Renewal Notice was average or better. Again, just about 5% were somewhat or completely dissatisfied.

QUESTION #10 D: LETTERS

On a scale of 1-5, please rate your level of satisfaction with the following Operator Certification Program communications and information sources.

Letters

Response Options	Total Responses	Percent of Responses
5 (Highest Level of Satisfaction)	229	24
4	337	35
3	284	30
2	24	2
1 (Lowest Level of Satisfaction)	11	1
Not Sure	77	8
Total Number of Responses	947	100
Not Responding	66	7

- Almost 90% of respondents are satisfied with letters received from Operator Certification staff. Less than 3% were not satisfied.

QUESTION #10 E: WATER TAP NEWSLETTER ARTICLES

On a scale of 1-5, please rate your level of satisfaction with the following Operator Certification Program communications and information sources.

Water Tap Newsletter Articles

Response Options	Total Responses	Percent of Responses
5 (Highest Level of Satisfaction)	388	40
4	357	37
3	182	19
2	15	1
1 (Lowest Level of Satisfaction)	12	1
Not Sure	23	2
Total Number of Responses	962	100
Not Responding	51	5

- Over 96% of respondents are satisfied with Water Tap Newsletter articles, and just under 80% gave this item their first or second highest rating.
- Just over 2% gave Water Tap Newsletter articles a low level of satisfaction.

QUESTION #10 F: TOLL-FREE TELEPHONE LINE

On a scale of 1-5, please rate your level of satisfaction with the following Operator Certification Program communications and information sources.

Toll-Free Telephone Line

Response Options	Total Responses	Percent of Responses
5 (Highest Level of Satisfaction)	268	28
4	252	26
3	189	20
2	27	3
1 (Lowest Level of Satisfaction)	26	3
Not Sure	198	20
Total Number of Responses	945	100
Not Responding	68	7

- About three-quarters of respondents rated their level of satisfaction with the toll-free telephone line a 3 or better.
- About 266 respondents did not complete the question, or marked “not sure,” indicating they may not have used this service.

QUESTION #10 G: OPERATOR CERTIFICATION WEB SITE

On a scale of 1-5, please rate your level of satisfaction with the following Operator Certification Program communications and information sources.

Operator Certification Web Site

Response Options	Total Responses	Percent of Responses
5 (Highest Level of Satisfaction)	103	11
4	189	20
3	194	21
2	20	2
1 (Lowest Level of Satisfaction)	26	3
Not Sure	391	43
Total Number of Responses	908	100
Not Responding	105	10

- Over half of respondents indicated at least some degree of satisfaction with the Operator Certification web site. However, only 5% were dissatisfied.
- Some 496 respondents, or about 49%, did not answer this question or marked “not sure.” Based on comments received, it appears many respondents either do not use this service, or are unable to access the web.

QUESTION #11: ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

A summary of responder comments is provided in Section V.

QUESTION #12: EASE OF SURVEY COMPLETION

How easy was this survey to complete?		
Response Options	Total Responses	Percent of Responses
Very easy	624	64
Above average	182	19
Average	151	14
Below average	7	1
Not easy at all	4	1
Not sure	8	1
Total Number of Responses	976	100
Not Responding	37	4

- Nearly two-thirds of respondents found the survey format “very easy” to complete. About 97% said ease of completion was “average” or better.

IV. SUMMARY OF RESPONDER COMMENTS

A complete list of responder comments is available as a separate appendix to this report. Operator Certification Program staff have reviewed the list and are responding to individual questions and comments as feasible. A few overarching comments, or themes, mentioned by 20 or more respondents included.

- Many respondents indicated staff was both prompt and courteous when called for help or clarification on a wide range of matters.
- There appears to be some confusion as to how owners/operators can earn CEU credit. Many respondents suggested ODW make individuals' CEU information available on-line.
- Some small system operators requested a more limited set of regulations and requirements. They feel the level of information requested by ODW forces them to contract out for help and is overly expensive. Many respondents who label themselves small system owners wish to be “un-grouped” from large system requirements and expenses, and requested additional training or specialized training for small systems only

APPENDIX

1) PUBLIC WATER SYSTEM OWNER SURVEY COVER LETTER

2) PUBLIC WATER SYSTEM OWNER SURVEY



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
OFFICE OF DRINKING WATER

New Market Industrial Campus, Bldg. 3 • PO Box 47822 • Olympia, Washington 98504-7822

TEL: (360) 236-3100 * FAX: (360) 236-2252 * TDD RELAY SERVICE: 1-800-833-6388

Survey Enclosed!

January, 2004

Dear Public Water System Owner,

The Washington State Department of Health, Office of Drinking Water is dedicated to providing top-rate service to our Operator Certification Program customers. To that end, we are asking our public water system owners to complete the enclosed:

Customer Satisfaction Survey

We estimate it will take you less than 3 minutes to complete the survey. Your responses will help us understand how you rate our services now, and how we might better serve you in the future. A separate survey will be mailed to water system operators next spring.

You have the following two options for completing the survey:

OPTION A: COMPLETE THE SURVEY ON-LINE (*PREFERRED OPTION*)

If you have web access, simply open your browser and type in:

www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/dw/ownsurvey

- OR -

OPTION B: COMPLETE AND RETURN THE ENCLOSED PAPER SURVEY

Separate survey from this cover sheet, complete, and return using enclosed pre-addressed, postage-paid envelope.

**Surveys must be completed / mailed no later than
February 13, 2004!**

The Office of Drinking Water thanks you in advance for taking time to provide your feedback. You will be notified once complete survey results are available.

Sincerely,

Office of Drinking Water Staff

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
OFFICE OF DRINKING WATER OPERATOR CERTIFICATION PROGRAM
PUBLIC WATER SYSTEM OWNER CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

The survey questions below are intended to help the Office of Drinking Water understand how Public Water System Owners rate our customer service now, and how we might better serve you in the future.

This survey is also available on the web at (www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/dw/ownsurvey.htm).

If you have internet access, we encourage you to take the on-line survey to save time and money.

Please complete the on-line survey, or return completed mail survey to the Office of Drinking Water **NO LATER THAN FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2004**. Please return mail survey using the enclosed pre-addressed, postage-paid envelope. Thank you for your time and valuable feedback!

↓ **SURVEY BEGINS HERE** ↓

PLEASE CHECK ONLY ONE (1) BOX PER QUESTION

1. Which of the following best describes your (survey respondent) position in your public water system:

☐ Owner ☐ Owner/Operator ☐ Board Member/Trustee ☐ Other: (Describe) _____

2. How long have you served in the position you indicated above:

☐ Less Than 1 Year ☐ 1-2 Years ☐ More Than 2 Years

3. In what county is your water system located?

Enter name of county here: _____

4. What is the population served by your water system?

☐ Less Than 250 People ☐ 251-3,300 People ☐ More Than 3,300 People

5. Overall, how would you rate your own understanding of Operator Certification Program requirements?

☐ Excellent Understanding ☐ Above Average ☐ Average ☐ Below Average ☐ Do Not Understand At All ☐ Not Sure

Comments / Suggestions:

6. Overall, how helpful have Operator Certification Program staff been in keeping you informed of program requirements?

☐ Extremely Helpful ☐ Above Average ☐ Average ☐ Below Average ☐ Not Helpful At All ☐ Not Sure

Comments / Suggestions:

7. Overall, how would you rate the promptness of Operator Certification Program staff responses to your inquiries and / or requests?

☐ Extremely Prompt ☐ Above Average ☐ Average ☐ Below Average ☐ Not Prompt At All ☐ Not Sure

Comments / Suggestions:

DON'T FORGET TO COMPLETE THE OTHER SIDE!

8. Overall, how would you rate the quality and clarity of information designed to help you understand the Operator Certification Program?

☐ Outstanding Quality / Clarity ☐ Above average ☐ Average ☐ Below average ☐ Poor Quality / Clarity ☐ Not Sure

Comments / Suggestions:

9. Overall, how user-friendly are the forms and applications you are required to complete?

☐ Very User-Friendly ☐ Above Average ☐ Average ☐ Below Average ☐ Not User-Friendly At All ☐ Not Sure

Comments / Suggestions:

10. On a scale of 1-5, please rate your level of satisfaction with the following Operator Certification Program communications and information sources. Please score all items A - G by filling-in one (1) bubble for each.

	SCORING: 5 = <u>MOST</u> SATISFIED / 1 = <u>LEAST</u> SATISFIED						
	5	4	3	2	1	Not Sure	Comments / Suggestions (More Space Below if Needed)
A. Conversations with Operator Certification Staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
B. Application Packet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
C. Renewal Notice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
D. Letters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
E. Water Tap Newsletter Articles	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
F. Toll-Free Telephone Line	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
G. Operator Certification Web Site	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	

11. If you have any additional comments or suggestions as to how we can better serve you in the future, please submit them in the space provided below:

Comments / Suggestions:

12. How easy was this survey to complete?

☐ Very Easy ☐ Above Average ☐ Average ☐ Below Average ☐ Not Easy At All ☐ Not Sure

Comments / Suggestions:

SURVEY ENDS HERE

PLEASE MAIL YOUR COMPLETED SURVEY ON OR BEFORE FEBRUARY 13, 2004. THANKS!